We claim:

1.   A method for facilitating evaluation, in connection with the procurement or delivery of products or services, in at least one of (i) a potential financial transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, each context involving a member of a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of counterparties in a second role, and, the method comprising:

a.   obtaining from each of the parties in the first class and storing in a first digital storage medium responses to a first set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such party's fit with a counterparty in such context;

b.   obtaining from each of the counterparties in the second class and storing in a second digital storage medium responses to a second set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such counterparty's fit with a party in such context;

c.   deriving, in a first computer process, from the responses of each such party a first preference profile for each such party;

d.   deriving, in a second computer process, from the responses of each such counterparty a second preference profile for each such counterparty;

e.   for each party, analyzing, in a third computer process, the preference profile of such party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties to derive a first list of counterparties providing a relatively close fit of such party's preferences with those of counterparties on the list and communicating the list to such party.

2.   A method according to claim 1, further comprising;

for each counterparty, analyzing, in a fourth digital process, the preference profile of such counterparty in relation to the preference profiles of the parties to derive a

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5   second list of parties providing a relatively close fit of such counterparty's preferences with those of parties on the list and communicating the second list to such counterparty.

3.   A method according to claim 1, wherein the list is ranked according to the closeness of fit.

10   4.   A method according to claim 2, wherein the list is ranked according to the closeness of fit.

5.   A method according to claim 1, wherein obtaining responses from each of the parties is accomplished using communication over a global communication network.

15   6.   A method according to claim 1, wherein obtaining responses from each of the counterparties is accomplished using communication over a global communication network.

7.   A method according to claim 5, wherein obtaining responses from each of the parties includes making a first set of web pages available to each of the parties, via

20   a server, the first set of such pages providing the first set of questions and permitting entry by such party of responses thereto.

8.   A method according to claim 6, wherein obtaining responses from each of the counterparties includes making a second set of web pages available to each of the counterparties, via a server, the second set of such pages providing the second set

25   of questions and permitting entry by such counterparty of responses thereto.

9.   A method according to claim 1, wherein a substantial number of the first set of questions elicits, with respect to each level of each of a first series of attributes, revelation of a utility value which indicates the value that the party places on the level of the attribute.

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10.   A method according to claim 9, wherein a second substantial number of the second set of questions elicits, with respect to each level of each of a second series of attributes that complements the first series of attributes, revelation of a utility value which indicates the value that the counterparty places on the level of the attribute.

11.   A method according to claim 10, wherein the process of analyzing the preference profile of the party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties is performed using a measure of distance between a set of utility values created with respect to the first series of attributes and a set of utility values created for the second series of attributes.

12.   A method according to claim 9, wherein each of the first set of questions requires the party to rank each of a non-null set of items from among a plurality of possible ranks.

13.   A method according to claim 12, wherein each of the second set of questions requires the counterparty to rank each of a non-null set of items from among a plurality of possible ranks.

14.   A method according to claim 9, wherein the substantial number of the first set of questions elicits revelation of the utility values without asking for the values explicitly.

15.   A method according to claim 10, wherein the second substantial number of the second set of questions elicits revelation of the utility values without asking for the values explicitly.

16.   A method according to claim 1, wherein the preference profile of each party associates, with each level of each of a first series of attributes, a utility value to indicate the value which the party places on the level of the attribute.

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17.   A method according to claim 16, wherein the preference profile of each counterparty associates, with each level of each of a second series of attributes that complements the first series of attributes, a utility value to indicate the value which the party places on each level of the attribute.

18.   A method for facilitating evaluation, in connection with the procurement or delivery of products or services, in at least one of (i) a potential financial transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, in each context involving a member of a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of counterparties in a second role, the method comprising:

    a.   obtaining from each member of a non-null set of party co-evaluators, each party co-evaluator being associated with at least one party in the first class, and storing in a first digital storage medium such party co-evaluator's responses to a first set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such associated party's fit with a counterparty in such context;

    b.   obtaining from each member of a non-null set of counterparty co-evaluators, each counterparty co-evaluator being associated with at least one counterparty in the second class, and storing in a second digital storage medium such counterparty co-evaluator's responses to a second set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such associated counterparty's fit with a party in such context;

    c.   deriving for each party, in a first computer process, a separate first preference profile, based on the responses of the party and on the responses of each co-evaluator associated with the party, if any;

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5   d.   deriving for each counterparty, in a second computer process, a

separate second preference profile, based on the responses of the counterparty and

on the responses of each co-evaluator associated with the counterparty, if any;

e.   for each party, analyzing, in a third computer process, the second

preference profile corresponding to each counterparty in relation to the first

10   preference profile corresponding to the party, to derive a first list of counterparties

providing a relatively close fit of such party's preferences with those of

counterparties on the first list and communicating the first list to such party.

19.   A method according to claim 18, wherein each party co-evaluator is one of:

(i) the party, (ii) a member of a group to which the party belongs, wherein the

15   group is relevant to such context, (iii) a parent or guardian of the party, (iv) an

advisor to the party, (iv) a relative of the party, and (v) a friend of the party.

20.   A method according to claim 18, wherein each counterparty co-evaluator is

one of: (i) the counterparty, (ii) a member of a group to which the counterparty

belongs, wherein the group is relevant to such context, (iii) a parent or guardian of

20   the counterparty, (iv) an advisor to the counterparty, (iv) a relative of the

counterparty, and (v) a friend of the counterparty.

21.   A method according to claim 18, further comprising:

for each counterparty, analyzing, in a fourth computer process, the first

preference profile corresponding to each party in relation to the second preference

25   profile corresponding to the counterparty, to derive a second list of parties

providing a relatively close fit of such counterparty's preferences with those of

parties on the second list and communicating the second list to such counterparty.

22.   An apparatus for facilitating evaluation, in connection with the procurement

or delivery of products or services, in at least one of (i) a potential financial

30   transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, each context involving a member of

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5   a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of
counterparties in a second role, the apparatus comprising:

     a.   a first computer process, in communication with a first digital storage
medium, for obtaining from each of the parties in the first class and storing in the
first digital storage medium responses to a first set of questions eliciting revelation

10   of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such party's fit with a
counterparty in such context;

     b.   a second computer process, in communication with a second digital
storage medium, for obtaining from each of the counterparties in the second class
and storing in the second digital storage medium responses to a second set of

15   questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the
closeness of such counterparty's fit with a party such context;

     c.   a third computer process for deriving from the responses of each such
party a first preference profile for each such party;

     d.   a fourth computer process for deriving from the responses of each such

20   counterparty a second preference profile for each such counterparty; and

     e.   a fifth computer process for analyzing the preference profile of each
party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties to derive a list of
counterparties providing a relatively close fit of such party's preferences with those
of counterparties on the list, and communicating the list to such party.

25   23.   An apparatus for facilitating evaluation, in connection with the procurement
or delivery of products or services in at least one of (i) a potential financial
transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, each context involving a member of
a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of
counterparties in a second role, the apparatus comprising:

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5 a. a first question and response module, in communication with a first digital storage medium, for obtaining from each of the parties in the first class and storing in the first digital storage medium responses to a first set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such party's fit with a counterparty in such context;

10 b. a second question and response module, in communication with a second digital storage medium, for obtaining from each of the counterparties in the second class and storing in the second digital storage medium responses to a second set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such counterparty's fit with a party in such context;

15 c. a first profile processor for deriving from the responses of each such party a first preference profile for each such party;

  d. a second profile processor for deriving from the responses of each such counterparty a second preference profile for each such counterparty; and

  e. a closeness-of-fit analyzer for analyzing the preference profile of each
20 party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties to derive a list of counterparties providing a relatively close fit of such party's preferences with those of counterparties on the list, and communicating the list to such party.

24. An apparatus for facilitating evaluation, in connection with the procurement or delivery of products or services in at least one of (i) a potential financial
25 transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, each context involving a member of a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of counterparties in a second role, the apparatus comprising:

  a. a first question and response module, in communication with a first digital storage medium, for obtaining from each member of a non-null set of party
30 co-evaluators, each party co-evaluator being associated with at least one party in

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5   the first class, and storing in the first digital storage medium such party co-
evaluator's responses to a first set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences
that can be used to estimate the closeness of such associated party's fit with a
counterparty in such context;

        b.   a second question and response module, in communication with a
10   second digital storage medium, for obtaining from each member of a non-null set
of counterparty co-evaluators, each counterparty co-evaluator being associated
with at least one counterparty in the second class, and storing in the second digital
storage medium such counterparty co-evaluator's responses to a second set of
questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the
15   closeness of such associated counterparty's fit with a party in such context;

        c.   a first profile processor for deriving, for each party, a separate first
preference profile, based on the responses of the party and on the responses of each
co-evaluator associated with the party, if any;

        d.   a second profile processor for deriving, for each counterparty, a
20   separate second preference profile, based on the responses of the counterparty and
on the responses of each co-evaluator associated with the counterparty, if any; and

        e.   a closeness-of-fit analyzer for analyzing, for each party, the second
preference profile corresponding to each counterparty in relation to the first
preference profile corresponding to the party, to derive a list of counterparties
25   providing a relatively close fit of such party's preferences with those of
counterparties on the list and communicating the list to such party.

25.   A method of structuring a database to facilitate evaluation, in connection
with the procurement or delivery of products or services, in at least one of (i) a
potential financial transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, in each context

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5   involving a member of a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a

second class of counterparties in a second role, the method comprising:

a.   obtaining from each of the parties in the first class and storing in a first

data record in a first digital storage medium responses to a first set of questions

eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such

10   party's fit with a counterparty in such context;

b.   obtaining from each of the counterparties in the second class and

storing in a second data record in a second digital storage medium responses to a

second set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to

estimate the closeness of such counterparty's fit with a party in such context;

15   c.   deriving, in a first computer process, from the responses of each such

party a first preference profile for each such party, and storing the first preference

profile in a third data record in a third digital storage medium;

d.   deriving, in a second computer process, from the responses of each

such counterparty a second preference profile for each such counterparty, and

20   storing the second preference profile in a fourth data record in a fourth digital

storage medium;

e.   for each party, analyzing, in a third computer process, the preference

profile of such party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties to

derive a first list of counterparties providing a relatively close fit of such party's

25   preferences with those of counterparties on the list and storing the list in a fifth

data record in a fifth digital storage medium.

26.   A method according to claim 25, wherein a substantial number of the first

set of questions elicits, with respect to each level of each of a first series of

attributes, revelation of a utility value which indicates the value that the party

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5   places on the level of the attribute, and wherein a set of utility values so created is stored in the third data record.

27.   A method according to claim 26, wherein a second substantial number of the second set of questions elicits, with respect to each level of each of a second series of attributes that complements the first series of attributes, revelation of a utility

10   value which indicates the value that the counterparty places on the level of the attribute, and wherein a set of utility values so created is stored in the fourth data record.

28.   A method according to claim 27, wherein the process of analyzing the preference profile of the party in relation to the preference profiles of the

15   counterparties is performed using a measure of distance between the set of utility values stored in the third data record and the set of utility values stored in the fourth data record.

29.   An apparatus for structuring a database, in connection with the procurement or delivery of products or services, in at least one of (i) a potential

20   financial transaction and (ii) operation of an enterprise, each context involving a member of a first class of parties in a first role and a member of a second class of counterparties in a second role, the apparatus comprising:

a.   a first question and response module, in communication with a first digital storage medium, for obtaining from each of the parties in the first class and

25   storing in a first data record in the first digital storage medium responses to a first set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences that can be used to estimate the closeness of such party's fit with a counterparty in such context;

b.   a second question and response module, in communication with a second digital storage medium, for obtaining from each of the counterparties in the

30   second class and storing in a second data record in the second digital storage

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5   medium responses to a second set of questions eliciting revelation of preferences

that can be used to estimate the closeness of such counterparty's fit with a party in

such context;

c.   a first profile processor for deriving from the responses of each such

party a first preference profile for each such party, and storing the first preference

10   profile in a third data record in a third digital storage medium;

d.   a second profile processor for deriving from the responses of each such

counterparty a second preference profile for each such counterparty, and storing

the second preference profile in a fourth data record in a fourth digital storage

medium; and

15   e.   a closeness-of-fit analyzer for analyzing the preference profile of each

party in relation to the preference profiles of the counterparties to derive a list of

counterparties providing a relatively close fit of such party's preferences with those

of counterparties on the list, and storing the list in a fifth data record in a fifth

digital storage medium.

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